For Absolute Beginners (Young & Old)

## **FREE COPY!**

# LEARN HOW TO PLAY



## **PLAY 3 SONGS IN 30MINS!**

Published by PLAY BY EAR Music School - 245A/B Victoria Street, Singapore (188032) | Tel: 63387939 | Web: www.play-by-ear.net

Published by Play By Ear, 2009 245B Victoria Street Singapore 188032

All rights reserved. No print of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrievable system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronics, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

## PREFACE

Do you envy some people who can play any tune they hear from the radio and think that will never happen to you?

It is not as tough as you imagine!

We are offering a short-cut method here to bring you from **nothing** to playing 3 simple tunes in 3 lessons! All you need is to lock yourself in a room with a keyboard for 30 minutes. You will not even be reading 'bean sprouts' (musical notes on ledger lines)!

These 3 lessons contain little theory, but aims to help you start playing right away without being bothered too much with technical things.

Nonetheless, to properly learn how to play and improvise, we suggest that you should get a real instructor. Play By Ear Music School **(Singapore)** offers some of the finest pop piano lessons in town!

#### PLAY BY EAR Website: www.play-by-ear.net

If you would like to try out this booklet but do not possess a keyboard (and you have no one to turn to!), you are welcome to book a studio for free with Play By Ear Music School (Tel. Number: +65 63387939, Address: 245B Victoria Street, Bugis Village, Singapore (188032)

#### LESSON 1

(Song used in this lesson: Lightly Row)



Before you start playing, here are some basics about notes.

English starts with **A** before moving on to **B**, **C**, **D**, **E**, **F**, **G** and so on.

For some reason, (in a way), music starts with C, then D, E, F, G, A, and finally B. Basically C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C = Do, Re, Me, Fa, So, La, Ti, To.

Got it? Great! Now, examine the keyboard diagram below and match them to the keys on your piano or keyboard:



Got the idea? Cool! Now, you will be playing your first song in no time!



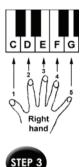
Firstly, your **right hand** and **left hand** will be playing **different** things/patterns. Every step will tell you clearly as for which hand it applies to.

Now, for **right hand**, out of the 7 different notes 'C, D, E, F, G, A, B', you will only be using 5 out of them for this song you are going to play: namely C, D, E, F, and G (the circled notes in the diagram below).



Before you start playing, use your **right hand** and position your fingers around the center of your keyboard.

Locate the notes C, D, E, F & G. Place your **thumb** on the 'C', subsequent fingers on subsequent keys. Like this:

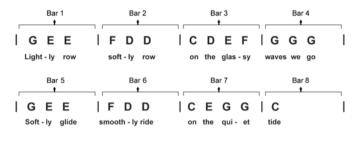


Now we are ready to start playing a simple tune with our **right hand**. Your first song: Lightly Row. The score is given below. Look at the notes, identify them and play them!

I	G	Е	Е	Ι	F	D	D		I	С	D	Е	F	Ι	G	G	G		L
	Light - ly row soft - ly row								on the glas-sy				waves we go						
I	G	Е	Е	Ι	F	D	D		I	С	Е	G	G	Ι	С				I
	Soft -	ly	glide	s	moot	h - ly	ride			on	the	qui -	- et		tide				

While playing, try to keep your **right hand** fingering position as what you learnt in *Step* 2. It will save you from unnecessary trouble.

Before we go on, you need to understand what is a 'bar'. The short vertical line that separate 'Lightly row' from 'Softly row' is called a 'bar line'. Between 2 bar lines, you get a bar. So as a matter of fact, this tune consists of 8 bars. Like this...





Now if you try to sing the tune, you realize you will pause for a little while when you sing until 'row', 'go', 'glide', 'ride' and 'tide'. Question is how long exactly do you have to pause at those places? To answer this question, let us try clapping our hands while singing the tune.

Clapping your hands is a simple way to ensure your timing (musically called 'rhythm') is correct. Here is the score that tells you exactly where you should clap.

Just a note: Singing and clapping really helps. If you are embarrassed, do that when no one is around!

١				, clap									G <sup>1</sup>			4 'CLAP'	I
	0	-	row	sof	-					-	-				-	4	
Ι	G	Е	Е	smoo	D	D	I	С	Е	G	G	I	С	'CLAP'	'CLAP'	'CLAP'	Ι

Notice that when we reach 'row', 'go', 'glide', 'ride', we clap our hands twice.

From this, we can conclude that every 'bar' consists of 4 'claps'. In music, the 'claps' are what we call 'beats'. So we say 'there are 4 beats in every bar'. (As a matter of fact, you will play a song of '3 beats' in lesson 3. So press on!)

Notice that the 'E' (row) holds for 2 beats and the 'D' (row) holds for 2 beats, and the last note 'C' holds (tide) for 4 beats. Different notes might possess a different time value. Some notes are shorter whereas some are longer.

Now try playing the song again (of course, with your **right hand**). This time, try tapping your foot **if you can** (instead of clapping), and follow the beats as accurately as you can!



Now it is time for you to use your **left hand**. The left hand will be playing **block chords**. But wait, what are chords and block chords?

Firstly, we must understand that a **note** is just one **note**.

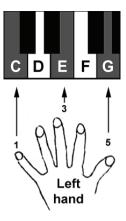
A **chord**, on the other hand, is made up of **more than 1** note (yes, 2 notes and above).

A **block chord** simply describes that you play those **notes all at the same time**.

Here we learn how to play 2 **block chords** first.

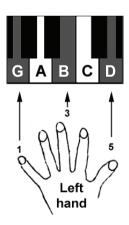


Play 'C', 'E', 'G' with your left hand little finger, middle finger and thumb respectively. Play all three notes together!





Play 'G', 'B', 'D' with your left hand little finger, middle finger and thumb respectively. Play all three notes together!



Remember, when playing a block chord on your left hand, you will play all three notes in the chord **ALL AT THE SAME TIME**!

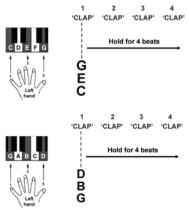
Before you start putting your two hands together, let us practice your left hand first! Try these 2 exercises.

#### Exercise 1:

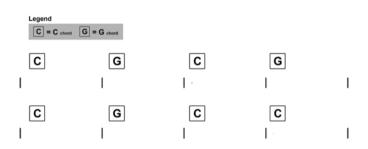
Play **C** chord and **G** chord back and forth to improve your speed of recognizing these 2 chords. Notice how your transition from one chord to another becomes more fluent. Try 'switching' between the 2 chords as fast as you can, even without looking at the keyboard!

#### Exercise 2:

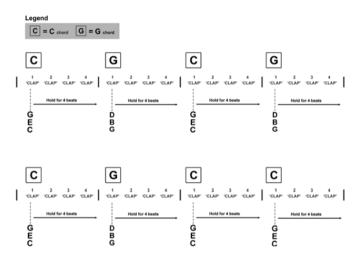
Play and hold each chord for 4 beats, like this...



Once you have tried that, we shall now try Lightly Row, but only with our left hand! Below is the score for Lightly Row. Notice that this score has no **melody** (melody is what you play with your **right hand**), but has only the chords (for **left hand**) written at the start of every bar instead.



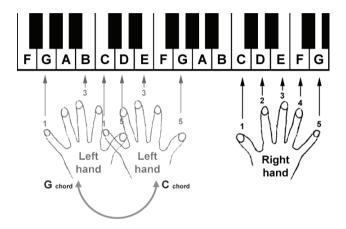
To practice, your left hand will play every respective chord **C** or **G** as written on the start of every bar. Once again, remember, that you have to press and hold every chord for 4 beats for every bar, like this...



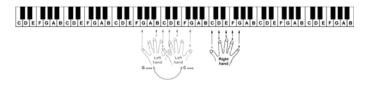
Once you have mastered these 2 chords, we are ready to move on. We will attempt to play with both our right hand and left hand together!



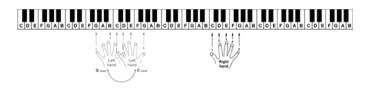
Before you start playing, let's position your two hands on your keyboard. **Chords** should always be on the **left** of your melody, thus your left hand should be placed on the left of your right hand. Like this...



In case you are wondering, your fingers should be positioned anywhere around the **center** of the keyboard or piano, like this...

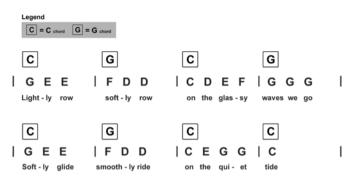


If you like to 'space' them out, it is also ok. Like this...



Most importantly, use your ears to judge. If it sounds good or fine, it is probably right.

This is the complete score of Lightly Row, with both melody (Right Hand) and chords (Left Hand).

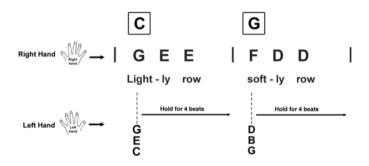


To play with two hands, your left hand chord is played together with the right hand note where the chord is written directly above the note.

Confused? Let's zoom in to just the first 2 bars.

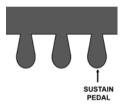
Look at bar 1, the first note on the right hand is a 'G' note. On top of the 'G' note, there is **C** chord. This means you should play **C** chord using your left hand, **while** you play the 'G' note on your right hand.

Like wise for bar 2, the first note on the right hand is a 'F' note. On top of the 'F' note, there is **G** chord. This means you should play **G** chord using your left hand, **while** you play the 'F' note on your right hand. Like this...





In order to make the notes you play sound more sustained and smooth, look out for the 'sustain pedal' near your feet area. If you only see one pedal, that is the 'sustain pedal'; if you see more than one pedal, the 'sustain pedal' will be the right most among all pedals. Step down on it (of course with your right foot) **all the time** when you play the tune! There you go!



By the time you reach here, you have fought the toughest of the battle!! Congratulations! You have come very far and I urge you not to give up as lessons 2 and 3 will be even more exciting and fulfilling. Trust me, after lesson 1, you will learn lesson 2 faster!

### LESSON 2

(Song used in this lesson: New World Symphony)

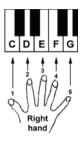
Let us now learn a more interesting (and challenging!) tune. It is interesting because the duration of the notes in this tune is more varied. You get some longer notes and some shorter notes.

Okay let me warn you first. In this lesson your **left hand** will do something quite different from that in lesson 1.

So be prepared to amaze yourself and people around you!



Let's start with our **right** hand. Similar to the previous tune 'Lightly Row', our right hand thumb will stay on the C, index finger on the D, middle finger E, etc. Try keeping to this fingering position.

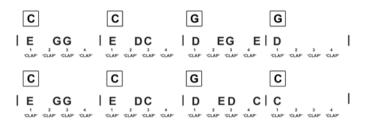


This will be our new song, 'New World Symphony'





This song is a little trickier than the previous one in terms of rhythm. If you are to clap with the song, this is what you get.



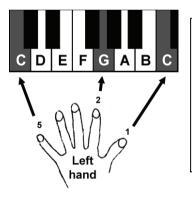
Notice that, for example, in bar 1, the 1<sup>st</sup> 'G' comes in the middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> claps. Therefore that 'G' should not be sung/played **at the same time** as the 2<sup>nd</sup> clap. Instead, it comes in **after** you have clapped the 2<sup>nd</sup> clap.

So you can conclude that that 'G' note has a value of **not** 1 beat, or 2 beats, but **half beat**.



Now our left hand is going to play something more interesting (and challenging too!) as well. We will play **Broken Chords**. As the name suggests, basically we break the notes in the chord down by playing them one after another.

So now when you see **C** chord, your **left hand** will **not** play 'C', 'E', 'G' together at the same time anymore. Instead, you will play **one by one:** the 'C' note with the little finger, followed by the 'G' note with the index finger, lastly followed by another 'C' note with the thumb. Take a look at this:



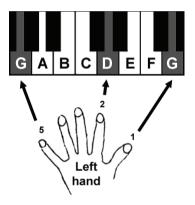
Now you might be wondering what happened to the 'E' note in the **C** chord? Do we not have to play it? Well. Let's just say we are giving that guy a break for now. So now when we see  $\mathbf{C}$  chord, our left hand goes

'C' (little finger) – 'G' (index finger) – 'C' (thumb).



The same principle applies to **G** chord, when we see **G** chord we play the broken chord pattern like this:

Take a look:



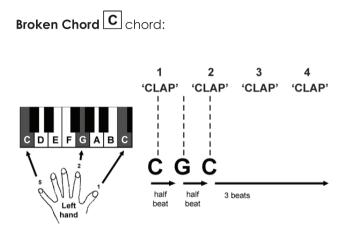
Step on the sustain pedal (the right most one!) while trying out these broken chords.



Now, we will practice our left hand with the right beats. In the previous lesson 'Lightly Row', your left hand plays the block chord, and stays for 4 beats. Let's recap.

Block chord C chord:

And now, for 'New World Symphony', your left hand is playing in **half beats**, which means in a space of 1 beat, you will play 2 notes. It's pretty fast, so try doing it as fast as you can!

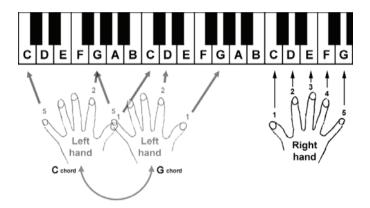


Try this out on both **C** chord and **G** chord to get a hang of it!

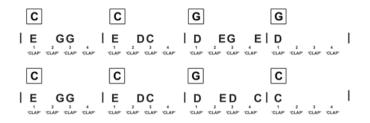


We will now attempt to play New World Symphony with the right hand playing the melody and the left hand playing broken chords.

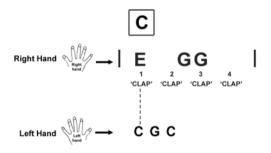
Let's place both your hands on the keyboard first.



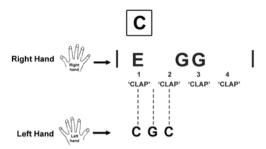
Now, here's the full score again.



Let's focus on the 1<sup>st</sup> bar. The 'E' will be played using the middle finger of the right hand, together with the 'C' using the little finger of the left hand.



After they have been played, left hand will proceed to complete the 'C chord' (i.e. playing the 'G' note and 'C' note)



Right after you finish playing all 3 notes on your left hand, then your right hand little finger comes in again for the 'G' note and so on.

Remember, while you are playing all these, press down and hold your sustain pedal!



Now go back to the full score of 'New World Symphony' and play the whole tune!

## LESSON 3

(Song used in this lesson: Amazing Grace)

If you have completed lesson 2, lesson 3 is going to be a piece of cake for you! The last tune we are going to learn is 'Amazing Grace'.



Here is the range of notes you will come across in this tune.

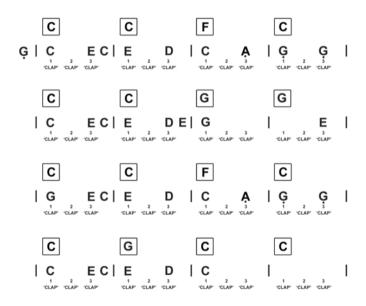


Notice that the 'G', 'A' and 'B' have a small dot below them. This is to differentiate the notes **lower** than the 'C' you are playing.

So for example, if you see the 'G', you will play the 'G' **above** the 'C' you plan to play. If you see the 'G' with a dot underneath, you will play the 'G' **below** the 'C'.



This tune is in 3 beats, which means every bar there should be 3 counts. Like this...



Try to clap your hands (or tap your foot) while singing the tune in order to get the beats.

Notice that there is a 'G' note before your 1<sup>st</sup> clap comes in. So you should sing/play the 'G' before you start counting the beats.

Now move on to the 1<sup>st</sup> bar, you will see that the C lasts for 2 beats. So you clap twice before singing the next note.

Also notice in the 1<sup>st</sup> bar, the 3<sup>rd</sup> clap contains 2 notes, namely the 'E' and 'C'. So when you clap on the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat, you need to sing 2 notes. As a matter of fact, each of them is a half beat.

Take note that the clapping should be **consistent**, which means there should not be any pause.

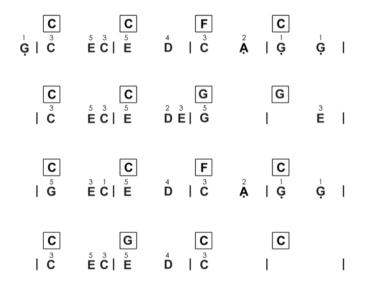


Once you get how the song should go, let us now try to play the melody with the **right hand**.

Try to get the notes right without being bothered by the fingering (for now).

Of course, if you are concerned about the fingering, you can refer to the numbers written above the alphabets.

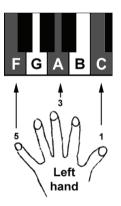
Right hand



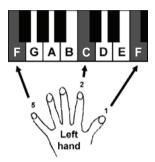


In this tune our left hand pattern will be the same pattern as that in 'New World Symphony'. Basically every bar there will be a chord. Every chord you will play 3 notes.

A new chord that we need in this tune is  $\mathbf{F}$  chord. Just like  $\mathbf{C}$  and  $\mathbf{G}$  chords,  $\mathbf{F}$  chord is made up of 3 notes, namely 'F', 'A' and 'C'. This is the  $\mathbf{F}$  block chord:



But for now, we are simplifying **F** chord to just playing 'F', followed by 'C', then end with an 'F' (which is the **F** broken chord). So you will be playing this:

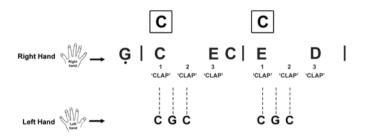


A quick revision for left hand broken chords:





Here is an illustration taken from the first 2 bars of 'Amazing Grace' to show you how your 2 hands will be coordinated.



Notice that both hands usually play together on the 1<sup>st</sup> beat. After which, the **left hand** will continue to finish up the 3-note pattern of the broken chord. After the left hand finishes, the **right hand** will come in again.



Now go back to the full score of 'Amazing Grace' in **Step 2** and play the whole tune!

## CONCLUSION

As you read this, I am sure you have come a long way! Hope this short journey has given you a glimpse of how fun and creative pop piano playing is! Trust me, there are just so many other things you can explore than what we have offered in this small booklet. It is an understatement to say that this book only offers you the tip of the iceberg.

To explore and enjoy more of pop piano improvisation, you are welcome to visit www.poppiano.com.sg or

Singapore's finest Pop & Jazz Piano Music School

#### PLAY BY EAR Website: www.play-by-ear.net

Get a teacher to inspire you too! Sign up at a music school and get going!

We sincerely wish you all the best in enjoying this gift of music!

Visit our website at: www.play-by-ear.net